

**Neil**

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

**Sam**

And I'm Sam.

**Neil**

Sam, have you ever heard the expression 'a problem shared is a problem halved'?

**Sam**

Yes, Neil, I have. Doesn't it mean that people often feel better after talking about their problems with someone?

**Neil**

Right - in this programme we'll be hearing the extraordinary story of how these ideas were taken up by a team of community grandmothers in Zimbabwe.

**Sam**

Zimbabwe has over 14 million people but fewer than 20 psychiatrists. After years of economic turmoil, unemployment and HIV, mental health is a huge challenge, and doctors estimate that one in four Zimbabweans suffers from depression or anxiety.

**Neil**

When it proved impossible to find free space to use in hospitals, psychiatrist Dr Dixon Chibanda, came up with the idea of turning public park benches into spaces for therapy.

**Sam**

He recruited grandmothers, who have both free time and plenty of life experience, to talk with individuals struggling with mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and trauma.

### Neil

The grandmothers are drawn from the local community and trained over several weeks in a talking therapy called CBT – but what does that abbreviation, CBT, stand for? That’s my quiz question. Is it:

- a) Chatting Based Therapy?,
- b) Conversation Brain Therapy? or,
- c) Cognitive Behavioural Therapy?

### Sam

Well, I think I’ll say c) Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

### Neil

OK, Sam, we’ll find out later. Now, although the recent history of Zimbabwe has left millions struggling with mental health issues, at the start of his project, Dr Dixon Chibanda was the only psychiatrist working in public health in the whole country.

### Sam

And as well as a lack of provision, many villagers were suspicious of talking therapy, preferring to rely on traditional faith healers instead.

### Neil

Which is why when Kim Chakanetsa, of BBC World Service’s *The Documentary Podcast*, spoke to Dr Dixon Chibanda, she started by asking him whether people were supportive of his idea:

### Dr Dixon Chibanda

Initially there was a lot of **scepticism**, a lot of resistance, particularly from colleagues who thought this was not evidence-based, and it wasn’t going to work. The whole idea of training grandmothers – I mean, this has not been done anywhere else in the world so naturally there was **resistance**.

### Kim Chakanetsa

Were you at all **apprehensive**?

### Dr Dixon Chibanda

I was, to be quite honest.

### Sam

At first, Dr Dixon Chibanda’s ideas were met with **scepticism** – an attitude of doubting whether something is useful or true.

### Neil

'Grandma benches' were a totally new idea, never seen before anywhere in the world and so his colleagues naturally felt some **resistance** - refusal to accept a change or new idea.

### Sam

Which left Dr Dixon Chibanda feeling a little **apprehensive** – worried that something bad was going to happen to his project.

### Neil

Fortunately, as it turned out, Dr Dixon Chibanda's **apprehensions** were wrong. Grandmothers are highly respected in Zimbabwean society and as they started listening, people began opening up and telling their stories.

### Sam

The 'grandma benches' have empowered over 50,000 people to deal with their life problems and Dr Dixon Chibanda even has plans to move his idea online, giving the world access to a virtual Friendship Bench.

### Neil

Here he is again, explaining on the BBC World Service's *The Documentary Podcast* why he believes his ideas have been so successful:

### Dr Dixon Chibanda

It works because it's simple, it's cheap and it's run by communities, particularly grandmothers who are in essence a resource in African communities – you know, they are the **custodians** of local culture and wisdom – that's why it works, and I guess, it **does away with** western concepts which remove the **stigma** that is normally associated with mental illness.

### Sam

Clients are willing to share their problems with the grandmother-therapists because they are respected as cultural **custodians** – people with responsibility for taking care of something or trying to protect ideas or principles, in this case local customs and wisdom.

### Neil

This helps **do away with** – or remove – the **stigma** attached to mental health – strong feelings of shame or disapproval which most members of a community have towards something, such as psychological illness.

### Sam

For Zimbabweans suffering domestic violence, unemployment and dealing with

HIV, having a grandmother to talk to really can change their perceptions about how problems can be managed.

**Neil**

So it seems true that ‘a problem shared is a problem halved’, which reminds me of our quiz question, Sam.

**Sam**

Yes. You asked me what the talking therapy abbreviated to CBT stands for. And I said c) Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

**Neil**

Which is absolutely right! CBT – a way of managing problems by changing ways of thinking and behaving.

**Sam**

So this week we’ve been hearing the inspiring story of Zimbabwean Dr Dixon Chibanda’s ‘grandma bench’ therapy - an idea which was initially met with **scepticism** – a doubtful attitude, and **resistance** – refusal to change and accept new ideas.

**Neil**

Dr Dixon Chibanda’s feelings of **apprehension** – worries that the project would fail, proved false when his team of grandmother therapists were treated as **custodians** – or protectors, of wisdom and life experience who really could help people suffering depression, poverty and trauma.

**Sam**

The success of the project helped **do away with** – or remove – strong feelings of shame or disapproval felt by many people regarding mental health, known as **stigma**. To hear more inspiring, topical stories, join us again soon here at 6 Minute English. Bye for now!

**Neil**

Goodbye!

## VOCABULARY

### **scepticism**

attitude of doubting whether something is true or useful

### **resistance**

refusal to accept a change or new idea

### **apprehensive**

feeling worried that something bad is going to happen

### **do away with (something)**

to remove it completely or put an end to it, (phrasal verb)

### **custodian**

someone with responsibility for taking care of something or trying to protect ideas or principles

### **stigma**

strong feeling of shame or disapproval which most members of a community have towards something